

Beauty And The Beast

Guardian1

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Summary

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Meaningless fluffy Freya in-game ramble, about - who else? - Amarant. PG13 for language and implications.

1. Beauty And The Beast

Beauty And The Beast

"Do you love me?"

His words hang quietly in the warm still air of the inn room, dark and silent save for our mingled breathing and perhaps the rhythmic intense note of his heartbeat. Coming from his lips, despite themselves, they are stark, glassy things; in no way romantic or warm or reassuring, but simply... there. They twist between us uncomfortably, despite the comfortable heat between our tangled naked limbs; I look up but his eyes are not on mine.

Fuck you, Amarant. You know that's not allowed, in the crazy set of unwritten rules between us.

"I want," I say, quietly and deliberately as he did, but my voice startles me in the night air as being even more pathetic than my words; "to tell you a story."

He does not answer, but that is not a rebuff in itself. He is merely waiting, bloodred hair coloured

midnight in the darkness. I wish I could tell him he is beautiful. I wish he would believe me if I did.

“Once upon a time, there was a monster who lived in a castle next to a little village far away.” One of my hand curls into his, to feel the pulse that beats beneath his thumb. He’s the only man I’ve ever felt helpless beside in comparison to his raw brooding strength and I never used to like the unspoken challenge. Why does my voice have to be so weak and reedy against the rumble of his breath? “He wasn’t really a monster, but under a curse.”

“Dumb shit.”

“Shut up.” My retort is sharp and immediate and I can feel, rather than hear, his chuckle. “Anyway, the monster lived in this castle, alone, for years, until one day he finds a man in his garden picking his roses. The man is, understandably, frightened of the beast’s appearance and of the monster accusing him of being a thief. The man said that he was taking the rose home for his youngest daughter, who had asked for it, and who was called Beauty because, well, she was.”

“Unoriginal mother.”

I ignore him. “And so the monster thought, well, hell, maybe I could use her to break my curse. And so he promises to not devour the man if he brings him his youngest daughter as payment for the rose. The man agrees.

“When she was brought there, she was not afraid of the beast’s appearance. Maybe she saw something in him of herself.”

“Maybe it was dark and she couldn’t see.”

“Maybe you’re asking for me to hit you.” I shift in his arms, our hips grazing together, sweet and warm. “Be quiet, damn you. This is important.”

He falls silent. One of my hands moves down to pull the sheet tangled between us higher, cool on our sweat-stained skin.

“She talks to him. She makes him laugh. The monster likes her. And that night, he says to her, ‘Beauty, do you love me?’

And Beauty says, ‘No, dear Beast, I do not.’

So he says, ‘Goodnight, dear Beauty,’ and he leaves her. The same thing happens every night. He asks her if she loves him; she does not, and so he tells her goodnight and leaves.”

The wind rustles outside the window. I keep my voice low; Gods forbid, on this stormy night, that we finally be caught. I think, perhaps, Zidane has guessed of our trysts — but he's kept quiet and whether he understands or not about our lovemaking (for the want of a better word) I don't know. Tribal has forgiven me, I think, too much over the years.

“One day, Beauty asks to be allowed to go home and see her family one last time. The monster agrees, but begs her to come back after three days or else he'll die. Beauty agrees that as well and she leaves for home. However, she forgets the Beast's warning.”

“Silly bint.”

I privately agree. “She comes back late to find the Beast lying near the rosebushes, as if dead, and —” My voice falters.

“Is that it?”

“No. I just remembered I don't like the ending to this story.”

He rolls over onto one side, blocking out the thin light from the window, face shadowed and eyes unreadable as he looks down on me. I pray he doesn't see my indecision as suddenly, quietly, he

strokes one finger down across my eyelids, closing them, rough-tender all at once. That's another rule you're breaking, Coral. "Tell me the rest of the damn thing."

"Beauty tells him that she's sorry and that she loves him, and cries over the body. He opens his eyes and he turns into a handsome prince and they get married and live happily ever after."

Silence reigns between us once more, but I can practically hear the wheels turn in his head this time as he thinks the whole thing over. "What's wrong with that ending?"

"She fell in love with the beast," I say, quietly, petulantly, opening my eyes and brushing a lock of milky hair behind my ear, "not the prince."

"Nobody would have understood her falling for the Beast, though." His voice is a quiet rumble in the back of his throat, scratchy and husky and rough. "Women don't love monsters."

"Can monsters love monsters?"

His large hands trace the scars along my throat, my wrists, my breasts, the battle scars from wars long over and the callouses on my palms where I hold a weapon of murder in my claws. You're not

supposed to touch me, Amarant, not for anything other than relief, our mutual analgesic for the pain. “I never believed in love, Crescent.”

“So why did you —”

I am silenced by him capturing me in one of our gloriously clumsy, never-meant-to-be kisses, confused and even half-afraid and the question *why* a scream inside my brain. Amarant has, quietly, managed to break all the rules tonight.

It would be too easy and I would be all too willing to stay by his side but, like Beauty, I can’t stay any longer. Amarant has broken my only foundations down and things are getting dangerous. “I need to get back to bed,” I mutter incoherently against the warm skin of his neck.

We break away from each other, slowly, limbs untwining and my tail untangling from its steadfast position wrapped around his ankle. He watches as, naked, I pick up my clothes. “G’night, rat.”

My mind is not connected to my throat as, turning back to him and pulling on my shirt, I suddenly ask, “Amarant?”

“What?”

“Once this is all over — once Kuja’s gone — ask me again.”

I flee from the silence of your eyes and, that night, I don’t sleep.

When it’s all over — finally, the last parting — and the airship has landed on the outskirts of my ruined homeland, I seek him out. I have already said my goodbyes to Garnet and Vivi and Steiner and the rest, but I had unwisely left this one until last. Now I had to face him, alone and unwilling.

He was leaning against the side of the airship nonchalantly, away from all the others, looking as if this was the most casual thing in the world and as if my leaving didn’t make him mind much.

“G’bye, Crescent,” he says gruffly as I approach.

I try to keep my voice light. “Anything you have to say?”

He shakes his head imperceptibly. No. I don’t know why that hurts. I don’t know what I mean.

“I want to ask you something.”

“Hmph. What?” Rough and rude and testy. I realize I considered him my lover, as unforgiving and as taboo as our joining ever was, all about the physical and having little to do with love — well, at the surface, anyway.

Why am I so clumsy with words? I’m a soldier, not a speechwriter. “Why did you ask — in the first place — if you didn’t believe in love?”

There’s footsteps behind us. I don’t need to turn around to know that it’s Fratley, come to take me home, to endless piles of rubble. He cannot know what we were talking about but stops anyway.

Amarant ignores him, not looking at anything, except perhaps me — as always, he is hiding behind his curtain of thick red hair, on fire in the afternoon sunlight, and I have to strain to catch his words. “I don’t. I thought I might be able to believe in yours.”

My world stops moving and I know, instinctively, I will hold those words close for the rest of my life. I also know — for him, and for me — what I have to do. Snapping into an immediate military pose, I bow to him, slow and deliberate and with all the grace I can clumsily muster.

“G’bye, Freya,” he repeats again, and I can’t remember when last he called me by my first name.

“Goodnight, dear Beast,” I say, and his eyes lock on mine for a single second before I turn around and begin to saunter back to Fratley, who is staring and bewildered.

“Freya.”

I stop but I don’t look around.

“I think,” and oh, how warm and amused his roughvelvet voice is — “that I prefer the stupid gits living happily ever after.”

Catching up beside Fratley I grip my spear tightly in my hand and I laugh and I laugh and I laugh, to disguise the catch in my voice. I’m glad for the helmet distorting my face because I think I might be crying.

Because, after all, Coral — the answer was always ‘yes’.

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